

# Pertussis

Fact Sheet

## **What is pertussis and what are the symptoms?**

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a persistent and highly contagious coughing illness that is spread through the air. Anyone of any age can get pertussis. The first symptoms of pertussis are similar to a cold. After a week or two, the cough worsens and begins to occur in sudden, uncontrollable bursts. Persons with pertussis may seem well between coughing spells. The coughing spells become less frequent over time, but may continue for several weeks or months until the lungs heal. Vomiting can occur following coughing. Children may make high-pitched whooping sounds when gasping for breath after coughing. People with pertussis usually do not have a fever.

## **How is pertussis spread?**

The pertussis bacteria are spread through droplets produced from an infected person when they cough, sneeze or talk.

## **How is pertussis diagnosed?**

To test for pertussis, the nasal passage is swabbed. The material on the swab is then examined in the lab for the presence of the pertussis bacteria. Only persons with symptoms of pertussis should be tested.

## **When and for how long can a person spread pertussis?**

Persons with pertussis can spread it to others in the first 3 weeks of coughing if not treated with antibiotics

After a person with pertussis has taken antibiotics for 5 days, he or she can no longer spread the disease. Although, the cough can continue even after completing a course of antibiotics. Without antibiotic treatment, a person is no longer considered contagious after 3 weeks of cough.

## **How long should someone with pertussis stay home from child care, school, or work?**

Persons with pertussis should stay home from child care, school and work until they have finished 5 days of antibiotics, unless they have already been coughing for 3 or more weeks.

## **How can pertussis be prevented?**

The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. In addition to routine childhood immunizations, a pertussis vaccine booster is recommended for adolescents and adults. The booster shot (Tdap) is given in combination with tetanus and diphtheria. Persons who have completed some or all of the recommended vaccinations for pertussis may still get pertussis disease, but will generally have a milder illness. Antibiotics are sometimes recommended and prescribed to prevent pertussis in close contacts of someone with pertussis. Ask your health care provider for more information or visit our website for information on low and no-cost vaccine:

<http://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/diseases/index.html>

**For more information about pertussis, please contact your health care provider or Clark County Public Health at (360) 397-8182.**



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